

A Wrench to the Heart

by PinkWhirlWind

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Summary: It's a few decades after the wars. Heero's been missing. Duo's looking for him, but he's also running a group home for kids and dealing with his own mental health issues. It's an odd slice of life and adventure story with a strong love story element.

1. Chapter 1

A Wrench to the Heart 1/?

By Max

Disclaimer: I don't own Gundam Wing

Notes: Not a Santa Clarita story. It's 1x2x1, eventually.

Warnings: Mention of drug abuse by Duo, by ocs, oc death, violence, criminal activity, a messed up Heero, foul language, probably some smoking, drinking, sex, various other questionable behaviors. It wasn't beta'd. I wrote it just for my own mental health. I hope some of you all might enjoy it too.

The truck was old. It had been old before the first US rocket breached the blue and flirted with the stars. It was huge with rounded and seafoam green with huge round headlights and enough chrome to dip a gundam in. The white on the original tires had been broader than his handspan, and the material on the tires was so old he had to send it out to have it sourced. It turned out to be made of some kind of plant blood called rubber - like real rubber. He'd mocked up some tires of a nice clean synthetic that looked like the originals. Duo figured his truck was from around 1992 - mostly because he found a love letter in the glove box with a date stamp on the envelope for that time. In any case, it was old. Like not quite Ancient Rome old, but still pretty old.

Duo rose up on his toes, reaching deeper into the engine block. Now

the engine block wasn't even remotely classic and might well have been in breach of patents and interplanetary law, but it was a work of love and he was pretty sure it was gonna break the sound barrier when he opened it up.

He himself looked too young to be who he was. At forty-five his face was lineless, his hair a dark chocolate, and he looked like he looked a couple years after the wars. His eyes were sharp violet, squinting at the plasma passage he was trying connect to the generator, long fingers reaching around other cables to push the connector into the right place. It was taking all his focus.

A small hand took a handful of his gray coveralls and tugged.

Eyes wide, his head came up right into the huge hood of the ancient truck. One eye twitched.

"Daddy! I'm not sick no more!"

Duo reached up to rub his head as he squatted down to be on her eye level. "'Sat so," he asked. His other hand reached out to touch the back of his hand to her forehead. She had dark curls and dark eyes, caramel skin and a smile full of baby teeth.

"Yups. I bes fine now. I wanna play My Little Ponies! I'ma gonna be Rainbow Dash."

Duo pushed at the back of his head, feeling the lump forming, the trickle of blood. "I'm glad you're feeling better. There's some math and English modules you need to work through, Julia."

"Nooooaaaaaoooo!" She said, big brown eyes wide. "I wanna play ponies!"

"One math lesson and one English lesson and then I'll unlock one level of Ponies. How's that?" Duo smiled crookedly, wiggling his eyebrows.

She eyed him, her rosy lips all drawn together as she evaluated his will. "One math."

Violet eyes rolled. She patted her hand on his knee. "DADDY, Please! I wanna play ponies!"

"Okay," he said, picking her up as he stood. She snuggled close, her slightly snotty nose rubbing against his coveralls as her hand reached behind him to grab at his coverall covered braid. "How about one level of Ponies and then one math and one English and then you can play Ponies until dinner."

"Okay," she said, head heavy on his shoulder, her thumb in her mouth. Voice muffled around her thumb, "I want macaronis and cheeses."

"Can do," he said, as he set her down on the couch. She fell over sideways, thumb still in her mouth. He pulled the fluffy blue afghan up over her, ruffled her hair, then picked up her tablet, keyed in the security code that would let her play a level of her game and handed her the tablet.

She moaned, eyeing, clearly struggling with if she should take her thumb out of her mouth to reach out and get it or maybe he'd just hold it for her.

"I have to go start dinner, Julia."

She sighed, rolled over on her belly and he tucked the tablet where she could reach it.

His house was pretty big, with ten bedrooms, but he lived with the twelve foster kids and his three adopted kids, and more barn cats then he wanted to count. He also had an assistant who went to college during the day, but helped out for room and board. She wasn't much good at somethings but she was damn fine at making great amounts of food that he could just slide into the warmer.

The kitchen was a huge affair with a nice polished table along the lines of a picnic table. There was a three method sink and a walk-in cooler in place of a fridge. There was also a really good first aide kit on the wall by the door that lead to the upstairs part of the house. He keyed in his personal code and it gave him access to a broader variety of medical tools. While it was opening, the AI in the kit scanned him and generated a empathy expressing face that looked a lot like Sally Wu. "Maxwell. Your white blood cell count is high. You need another treatment. You are also bleeding from a small wound on your scalp. You have to do your best to not take damage until your treatments are complete. Do I have permission to raise my nag level?"

"Yeah, fuck no. I'm fully away of my condition. Give me a knitter for the scalp wound and take your nag level down two notches."

A small tube of medication appeared in the materization port. His fingers shook as he picked up and opened the tip with his thumbnail. As he dribbled it on the cut on his scalp, the AI had shifted representations and now looked like Heero Yuy. Heero smiled a sweet and adoring smile that no Heero Yuy ever had smiled. "Good job, Duo. I'm so glad to see you taking such good care of yourself."

"Thanks, Heero. How ya comin on that new body o'yours?"

"I'm sorry Duo. I can't print myself a new body. I'm not the real Heero Yuy. Do you need me to make you a therapy appointment. It has been two years and four months since your last appointment with Dr. Graves."

"Nope. Up your nag rate by two notches. Thanks."

Sally glared at him. "You are definitely in need of more medical care than I can give you as a first aid box, Maxwell. You need to restore my connection to the greater net so I can provide you with greater care!"

Duo wrinkled his nose, tossed the empty tube into the recycle shoot. "Like the time you called the EMTs on me because I was drunk? No. Thank. You."

"You were making credible threats of self harm."

"Yeah, well, I was drunk off my ass, Sally." Duo winked, keyed in the code that would shut the box down. It folded in on itself until it looked like a nondescript little beige box on the wall.

Next he went about getting the long pans of dinner out of the walk-in and into the ovens. It turned out dinner was mac and cheese and baked chicken. Not his favorite, but he wasn't sure had the energy or the will to make himself anything else.

After the pans were into the oven, he went into the restroom by the kitchen, stripped out of his coveralls and stared at himself for a moment. If he stared long enough, he wondered if he'd succeed in making Heero's ghost appear behind him this time. Slightly too slender fingers touched the mirror and he whispered, "Bloody Heero, Bloody Heero, I dare you to fuckin' show."

It didn't really rhyme and it wasn't the way it had been in the movie and it was completely stupid, but it still made him feel a tiny spike of happiness. If anyone was going to be a vengeful ghost, it wouldn't be fuckin' Heero Yuy.

He hung his coveralls up and made back into the kitchen in time for the buzzer on the oven letting him know that the oven was heated enough to put the food in, though he'd already put the food in so he wasn't real concerned.

"DAAADDDD! I need tissues!" Julia hollered.

He rubbed his temple, head bowed for a moment. He hadn't been a religious man in a goodly while, but there were times he missed the comfort of it. Somehow, when Heero stopped being alive, it just wasn't possible to believe in anything else.

Out of the corner of his eye though, out the window by the sinks, out into the grassy yard, right in front of the big wooden swing set, he saw a scraggly figure with tangled purple hair and a coat like it was January on a nice April day. Duo jaw went steely. The whisper of Shinigami, who had long lain quiet and waiting in Duo's non-existent soul, curled up hungry and attentive, "Dangerous... Kill her."

Duo wanted a shot of whiskey about as badly as he'd ever wanted such a thing. Instead, he splashed some water on his face, scrubbed with the kitchen towel, and shouted. "I'm going in the yard. Julia - go to your room. Shut the door. Do not come out for any reason. Now."

"Yes, Daddy," she said, stomping as she went up the stairs, just so he'd know she was unhappy about it.

After he heard her door closed, without taking his eyes off the vagabond looking girl in the yard, he pulled a jar of peanut butter out of the cabinet. She was out of his sight for the time it took him to make it to the back door and he was relieved to see her standing in the same place.

There is something in the heart of a parent, even if not biological, just adopted or long term foster, that when it cracks, there's nothing that feels like it will ever fully plaster over. She was at most eighteen or nineteen. With kids like he'd been, born in the aftermath of the wars, that it just wasn't always possible to now the

real age. Her hair was matted, spotted with purple and green dye that was likely the leftovers of a party more than intent, but it reminded him of bruising. Her shoes didn't match, but at least they looked like they fit well enough. He was glad he couldn't see her arms.

After Heero had gone, he'd gone through a couple months of drug use, but he didn't really understand the appeal and he didn't approve and standing a couple feet from the first foster kid he'd ever taken in, he wasn't sure if he should hate himself for not doing a better job or hate drugs or hate ... god, except there wasn't any god and his nose wrinkled for a moment and he thought about hating Heero.

Maybe if Heero hadn't died and they'd gotten together, together they could have done a better job. Heero had always been better at fucking everything so that made sense. It was all Heero's fault after all.

His chest literally hurt as he stood there next to her and finally he broke shoved the jar of peanut butter in her direction. "You need to eat more."

She liked dry, parchment pale lips. "I want to get clean."

"Go to the Center. I'm an engineer, not a doctor and I sure as fuck don't do rehab, Tyla."

"I'm in trouble."

"Of course you are," he said shoving the peanut butter at her as if that would everything. Thicken the blood right up. Yes, yes it would.

"They want you to race. If you don't race, they'll kill me." There wasn't much emotion in her face. It was like age was a snake and it was swallowing her whole, creativity, spark, dreams, cognition, all fading away well before they should.

He dropped the jar of peanut butter on the grass. "Go to the Center. They can't get you in the Center and once you're clean, you can transfer to a different colony, start a new life. You don't have to let them bully you."

There it was, some spark of emotion, but was dark, angry. Whatever human process had become Shinigami in him, had become something else in her. "I'll go to the Center if you race."

"Do you promise," he said, remembering when she had been so small, so sweet, remembered reading her bedtime stories.

"Sure. Yeah. You promise to race? And not get hurt?" The memories of bedtime stories showed in her pale lined face. "I don't want you to get hurt. Are sick?"

"Yeah, I promise," he said, comforting himself that she'd asked so many questions that it was legitimately confusing what he was promising.

From the back steps, Charlotte, his current assistant called, "Duo? Everything okay? Dinner's in the oven, right?"

He looked over his shoulder, but only for a very brief moment, "Yeah, Charlie, everything's great. Dinner's in the oven. I'm gonna go down to the Center. Might be late. Tell the kids I'll tuck'em in when I get home."

"Okay," she said, unsure of the situation.

"Everyone stays inside tonight," Duo said firmly, wishing he'd grabbed a coat before he went outside. "No exceptions. Lock all the doors. Use the first aid kit to turn on the extra security."

"Yes, Sir," she said, and then turned tail and ran back into the house.

"Overkill much? Yer crazy," Tyla accused.

Shinigami boiled under skin. It made his gums itch. He leaned closer to her, smelling the novo on her skin, lingering in her breath, her hair, on her clothes. His smile was more of a grimace, teeth bared, "At least I'm alive and have a house to secure."

She returned his sneer, her expression very similar to his, just like she was actually his kid, "Yeah? Well, at least I don't drink my ass to sleep each night cryin over some heartless fucker I couldn't even tell I wanted to fuck when he was alive."

Shinigami coiled and writhed in him, begging for blood. Duo took a step back, rubbed his eye socket, his jaw, wished he didn't feel hollow. If it wasn't for his kids, there wouldn't be any point, and looking at Tyla, he wasn't real sure there was a point, even with them. "Go around front. I'll get a car."

"You race tonight."

Part of him wanted to, to race, to run, to feel machine roar under him, to drop into space, and dance around the outside of the colony like some manic metal firefly. He hadn't stopped racing because he lost or because he didn't like it. Just like novo, he liked it fuck tons. He stopped because he couldn't take good care of his kids and race, or jack up on novo. It was one or the other.

"Sure," he said and in that moment, he wasn't real sure he wasn't going to go through with it. Maybe just one more go, one more race, small jack up. Jacking up would knock back the pain, make him stronger. If he was going to race, he'd have to jack up a little. "Meet me in front, Tyla."

A few minutes later, he pulled up out of the underground garage in a black late model Mustang. It was completely electric. The colonies did not allow fossil fuels and Duo was totally behind that. He really hated getting called in for air filter cleaning. His car roared though, which was totally a noise violation, but there weren't that many people in his area of the colony. Those that were tended to be pretty close knit. It was Shinigami under his skin though that revved the engine again, roaring loud enough that it shook the windows of his house and he probably was going to get a nasty email about sound pollution from the colony authorities.

Tyla jumped into the passenger seat.

Duo flicked on the aircycler, desperate to get the stench of novo out of his mind.

"Yer a fuckin' jacker," Tyla accused.

"I ain't the one gonna be sleepin in the Center. Put yer seatbelt on," Duo snapped, refusing to move the car until she did.

She finally sat up, pulled the safety harness on. Her nose wrinkled and he could just hear her telling him he wasn't real father.

He wanted to snap that he was as good as she was going to get and it sucked to be her, but didn't. It was really hard not to see her when she was eight, lost and half feral from living on the streets and maybe to see himself in her. "I'd let you come home, but I've got other kids now too, you know. Some of them have never... well, been on the streets or anything."

"Innocent little angels," she snapped. "Fuck'em."

"Well, I like to keep the house a safe place. It needs to stay safe. I didn't make your choices for you, Tyla. I've helped you all I can."

"Yeah," she said, not convinced. "Yer helpin me tonight though."

"Yeah," he said, eyes on the road.

It took the nearly an hour to get to the Center. By the time they got there, Duo thought the hard part of his night was about over. He was wrong.

2. Chapter 2

A Wrench to the Heart 2/?

By Max

Disclaimer: I don't own Gundam Wing.

Warnings: Same as yesterday, drugs, violence, homicidal ideation, mental illness, sci fi weirdness, eventual 1x2x1

Chapter Two

The Center looked like a nice Victorian house, blue with white trim, green grass, and what looked like actual butterflies dancing in the yard. Duo had been inside though. Inside looked nice as well. The four floors below with enough inpatient space to treat 125 guests though and what kind of treatment withdrawals caused gave him a distaste for fucking butterflies.

As he put the car in park, sentimentality made his heart hurt and he turned to look at Tyla. She had his last name because she hadn't had her own when she'd come to him. Hands still on the wheel, eyes on her, it was so easy to see the little girl she'd been. "Hey. I'm sorry. I can be an asshole. I'm not always right in the head. You're

my kid. You can always come home. I'll always help. You gotta get clean, Ty. Novo is shit. It'll eat yer life, baby."

Whatever sharpness was on her tongue melted. She slumped down into the chair. "I ain't really goin in there."

"You think I can't throw you over mah shoulder an' carry yer ass in?" Duo challenged, faced twisted up in irritation.

"I fuck'in doubt it," she said. "Yer sick. We both know it. You not wantin to go through treatment ain't much different than me not wantin ta go through withdrawls, now is it? If you race, you'll end up dead anyway. If they just kill me instead, well, then we're ahead in the long run. How come you still love me?"

"Tyla, love isn't a math problem. It's like boiling colors. There's no way to say what it does or doesn't do."

"Oh you so have a brain tumor. That made no fuckin sense, Dad. When I die, are you gonna get all cry-y like you did over your boyfriend?"

The only good think about Shinigami was that he didn't deal with stuff like this. There wasn't any credible physical threat, so Shini might as well have been out on the back porch of Duo's mind smoking a cigarette watching the clouds stroll by. Duo just sat there in the car, looking up at the fake clouds for a moment, wishing he still smoked. "I haven't given up yet. I think yer gonna walk into the Center and get clean. Don't you remember when you used to paint? You used to make the most beautiful things. What if you had a whole different life. You starting a family of your own, bringin yer kids over to play in the yard with your little brothers and sisters. Imagine just never going back to the interlevels. Live in the light..."

"Like that's even possible?" She leaned her seat back a little, eyes watching around them, furtive and nervous.

He wasn't sure if she were actually expecting them to be attacked or if she were just too long between hits. "It's possible. There are whole neighborhoods of new houses. Once you get clean, your citizen stipend will start again. Paint beautiful things."

She rolled on the seat. Under the puffy coat, she had to be really small, boney. He wanted to reach out to her, but he was genuinely afraid she'd bruise or flutter away like dust. "I remember," she said, distant, eyes glassy.

"What do you remember," he asked, leaning his seat back so he could lay back, which took some of the pressure off his head, easing the headache hadn't realized he had. "Tell me."

She licked those dry pale lips. "My mom. She held my head in the toilet. My chest burned. Then I remember you. Did you kill my mom?"

"No." Duo took a deep breath, silently told himself he could not have half a bottle of bourbon and a pack of smokes. "But If I'd walked in on her doing that, can't say I wouldn't have. You deserve better, Ty."

"Would you die to protect me?"

"If I had to," he said seriously, studying her.

"So that's the right thing to do? To protect the people you love?"

"We don't live in that kind of world, Tyla. I fought a nasty war so that you don't have to live in that world. The interlevels make it out to be not fair, to be this dark place. It's not true. The L2 cluster is a good place to be now. The people living in the interlevels... they're sick. They don't get it. I'm yer dad. I'd die for you if I have to. Trust me."

"Can you prove you didn't kill my mom?"

"Maybe," Duo said, sitting his seat back up. He pulled a screen up out of the dash board. One hand moved in front of the screen as the computer captured the motion of his fingers, interpreting it as a super fast speed typing. "Here, there's the police report on your mom. Syfai Yarrow. Note her time of death," Duo pointed to the screen.

Tyla sat up looking, her fingers reaching out to touch the police report images of her mom's body.

"Here. This is my stay at the Center. I was there a month before and two months after. I can't have killed your mom. You came to live with me the following year."

"You were in the center... for three months," she said as some light came back into her eyes, some deep anger and hurt melting away. "You didn't kill my mom. You got clean. You think I can too? Really? You won't let them hurt me?"

"I won't let'em hurt you," Duo promised, smiling sheepishly, afraid to let himself be hopeful. Maybe she was going to be okay and he was going to blame Heero for that too. Everything was always Heero's fault.

"You promise that you'll always be my dad, no matter what?"

Duo rolled his eyes, cheeks sucking in. "What are you? Nine? Of course I'm always going to be your dad, idiot. I'll come visit you everyday. I'll drive you home. I could use more help with the kids. You think you could live with that?"

"I can really come home?"

"Yeah, but after the Center certifies you. Okay."

She reached out and grabbed his hand. "Dase said he'd kill me if I didn't get you to agree. There's an Earther that wants to race against the best and folk say that's you. I owe him. He's gonna kill me."

Shinigami uncoiled in Duo's mind, sliding over thoughts like a dark black dragon. 'SOooooOOO. Can I kill that one? Can I pull his bones from his skin? Please?'

"If anyone's gonna die, it ain't gonna be you. I've had about all the warm and cuddly I can deal with today. I'll walk you in. I'll be back tomorrow."

"Dad."

He motioned for her to move, up, out... gotta go.

She pulled the zipper down on her big puffy coat, revealing wires, primitive explosives. Real homemade shit. "I'm sorry."

Duo stopped being in that moment, lost in stress beyond he could deal with. Shinigami flexed his fingers, his grin sharper, violet eyes darker, much more twilight like there was very little soul left. "Oh, baby, this ain't no thing," he said, voice slick and dark, clearly not Duo's voice.

"Hey, Shini. You gonna kill me," she asked, tears pooling, slipping shadowed down pale skin.

"Shut up." He keyed open a concealed compartment in the glove box. He pulled out a real old dose of novo and a small tool kit. The dose fell to the floor and he went right into the tool kit. Looking at the vest on her, he wrinkled his nose. "You didn't build this. I taught you better. Did you really think the chatbot killed your mother?"

"No. I thought you did."

Shinigami wiggled his eyebrows, winked. "I thought you knew me. Why the hell would I kill your mother?"

"Cuz... cuz of what she did to me?"

"Don't confuse me and Duo. If you break his heart again, I will kill you. Do you understand me?" He made quick work of the bomb, taking risks with both their lives, but calculated risks that were better than the alternatives. "Just imagine a world where his heart is broken and he never comes back and all you've got is me."

She wiped her cuff over her sleeve. "You'd really kill me?"

"Do I lie," Shinigami said, drawing the words out, playful and a little insane. "Out of the car. Don't run."

She swallowed hard, but stepped out of the car. Shinigami moved fast and was around her side before she closed the door. He had her by the back of the neck, around to the back, where he put the coat and the vest into the truck, locked it, and then with his hand still on the back of her neck, walked her right up to the front door of the Center.

At the door she started to struggle. He grabbed a handful of her hair. "No! I just wanna talk to Dad again, please!"

"Sorry. He can't come play right now. I'll give'im yer regards." Shinigami let go of her, motioning for her to enter the light filled doorway. One could not actually be forced into the Center. One had to enter of one's own free will. "Ya gonna go in and get right? Ya could

stay with me. I'll make ya stronger." He winked, Somehow his canines seemed more pronounced, his eyes darker, more color in his cheeks.

She shook her head and slipped into the light of the Center, into what was possibly the most advanced treatment center for drug addiction. Quatre had given it as a gift to the L2 Cluster as a gift to keep Duo's then-drug-addicted-ass out of jail for an armed data breach. Duo learned everything he knew about giving lectures from Quatre.

Camelot.L2 had other very nice medical facilities, with powerful and very effective AIs. Any one of them could have completely cured Duo of both the blood infection and the tumor that was constantly trying to grow in his brain. There was no cost for medical care on Camelot which functioned as a commonwealth. The problem was that they would want to mute his memories of Heero, pointing out that ten year gone memories were hardly accurate memories anyway and he would have much less depression and a better quality of life if he muted those memories to sweet warmth. The mental health divisions of healthcare weren't likely to really approve of Shinigami either. Shinigami really did not fancy being deleted for the cause of giving Duo Maxwell a more normative experience. Every now and then, Duo let him kill someone. It worked out great.

Still, letting Duo die from lack of medical care was hardly conducive to his societally beneficial serial killer hobby. So it was time to go visit Chang Sung. The interlevels were just that. They were spaces between the inner skin and the outter skin of the colony. They also occupied spaces where expansions had been planned, but not completed. The air was dirty. The temperatures were unsteady. Every now and then solar flares would literally cook those that lived in the least shielded areas. Duo didn't understand why anyone would live in the interlevels.

Shinigami didn't understand why anyone would ever come out of them. No Law. No normative. No forgiveness. No sweet polite friperies. The strong didn't need permission. There was racing, fighting, sex of every variety. It was nothing like the sweet and beautiful inner skin Camelot with its virtual sky and charming trains.

He parked the pretty mustang in a nice safe parking garage, shoved the vest into a knapsack in the truck along with his tool kit, then went back for the novo on the floorboards. He thought about checking with Charlotte, but he was afraid if he contacted the house, he'd lose control of the body before he took care of some shit. Also from a hidden compartment in the trunk, Shinigami pulled a small disk, just about big enough to stand on.

Unlicensed gravity inversion disks were also, not surprisingly, illegal in Camelot. Shinigami nearly whistled as he half skipped up to the roof of the parking garage. A moment later, he was a shooting star aimed at the pretty blue sky and then he disappeared right into it, his presence cloaked from prying eyes and safety keepers as well.

The street was a mess of unplanned growth in carbosteel and biocrete. The shop he went into looked like something out of a western movie, part saloon, part telegraph office. The seeming wood construction was just daydreaming biocrete. Shinigami walked through the swinging

doors, admired the realism of gunpowder and blood lingering in the air. A saloon dancer approached him, thick skirts swirling, even though the face had a touch of facial hair, too strong of a jaw to be female. Shinigami made a handsign and the dancer disappeared around him like a disintegrating mist.

At the top of the stairs, Chang Sung, son of Chang Wufei misted into being. "Shini. Nice to see you. You're fucking three months late. ARE you trying to die?"

"Naw, man. I just couldn't get control of the damn body. The fucker's just happy these days. It's gonna be the fuckin' death of us." Shinigami boosted himself over the bar and grabbed a bottle of whiskey. "Any word on our other project?"

The news had covered Heero's death. There had been a huge public funeral. Neither Duo nor Shinigami had gone. Relena accused him of being in denial. Duo had not dealt well. Shinigami had hunted information. It was the only thing he liked as much as the blood of his enemies. Turns out, there wasn't any really good sources on what happened to Heero. Some sources say he was killed in a gunfight with terrorists. Other sources claim he had been on a ship that was hit by war debris that suffered a fatal decompression. There were very convincing medical records that he had died of a rapid progression of an untreatable cancer. There were too many clues for it not to have been constructed, which meant Heero might not actually be dead.

When those thoughts leaked across their barrier, Duo had thoughts of abandonment and broken heartedness. Shinigami didn't fucking love Heero Yuy, or anyone else, but he still needed to find out what had happened. In his very darkest moments, he feared that he had killed Heero after the chat bot confessed his undying love and got laughed at. It was a possible scenario.

"Actually, yes," Sung said. "I don't see why you won't let me email Duo."

"You work with me," Shinigami said, dark violet eyes threatening.

Sung, who was a beautiful and willowy creature with long fingers and black hair longer than Duo's that flowed and swirled as he walked, the tips lighting up like a swarm of fireflies, he held up his hand and arched an eyebrow at him. "Don't give me that look. You owe me your life twenty times over." He reached those slender fingers into his long brocade sleeve and pulled out a piece of folded parchment. "I have here a transcript of what is the last email sent by Heero Yuy. It was sent from the Rage ES, before its destruction. It is possible that they were attacked."

Shinigami reached for the paper and Sung pulled back, smirking, then handed it over.

Those dark violet eyes faded just a little, lightening as they read the letter.

"Duo ...

Emily Dickinson h"

"That's it," Shinigami asked, eyebrow arching. "Who the hell is this Emily chick?"

"Your education is sorely lacking. She's a poet from before sky breach. Maybe Duo knows something."

"Maybe he does," Shinigami said, rolling his eyes, "You have no idea the ravages his emotional state does to me when he gets on about Heero. I'll find Heero myself. You got my treatment ready?"

"Of course," Sung said, smiling like a happy dungeon master. "You shouldn't have waited so long. It's going to hurt."

"Good," Shinigami said. He poured himself another shot of Sung's whiskey, and then followed the devious Chinese man back up the stairs. "Make his ass sore as fuck tomorrow."

"My pleasure," Sung said. "I have revamped the treatment. You might actually get a cure this time. Or you could die. I'm not for sure."

Duo woke face down in his bed, clothes still on, braid laying over his head, trailing towards the floor, one shoe on, the other on its side by the door. He had dry mouth like he'd tried to drink one of those damn deserts on Earth. He opened his mouth, dry tongue sticking out like that was going to help at all.

Oddly, he felt better than he'd felt in ... a long time. His head didn't hurt. He felt like he could go for a run, a real run, though as he moved everything hurt. He felt like he'd hosted the running of the bulls in his veins and he still felt better than he'd felt in longer than he could remember.

"Oh my god, you're awake!" Charlotte said as she peeked in the door. "Are you okay? I wanted to call medical services, but Jake told me you do this sometimes and you didn't need medical intervention. I was so worried!"

"I'm fine," Duo said, as he rolled onto his back. "Best night's sleep in a while."

"Two nights. You slept all day yesterday. I swear to god I thought you were dead."

Duo sat up, scratched his head, then shivered. "Fuck. I'm hungry!"

"Really," Charlotte said. She'd been complaining about his lack of appetite since she took the job. "There's food. Oh and I missed class yesterday, so you need a backup plan if you're going to do this again."

"Sure, no problem," Duo said.

Then Julia was like a siren coming down the hall. "DAADDDDDDDYYYYYYY!" She was in the door and onto the bed, bounced a couple times and threw herself into his lap. "Daddy's awake! Can I play ponies?"

"You do lessons?" He asked, smoothing red curls back from her face.

"Yup! I was so good so you'd wake up! Now I wanna play ponies!" She smiled angelically.

"Okay, let me get a shower and I'll come down and unlock it for you."

She bounced off the bed and ran around in a circle, then out the door.

"I'll warm up some food for you. You look better today, more color in your face."

"Hn." Duo said, mostly ignoring her as he went into his bathroom. There on the mirror, written in black lipstick was, "Emily Dickinson." The freaky thing was it was in his own handwriting. He grabbed the hand towel and scrubbed it away.

****That I did always love****

That I did always love,
>I bring thee proof:
That till I loved
>I did not love enough.<p>

That I shall love alway,
>I offer thee
That love is life,
>And life hath immortality.<p>

This, dost thou doubt, sweet?
>Then have I
Nothing to show
>But Calvary.<p>

Emily Dickinson

3. Chapter 3

A Wrench to the Heart 3/?

By Max

Disclaimer: On this one... not any great warnings. Duo's a little crazy though. :)

Chapter 3

All the rest of the kids were at school, but Julia ran circles around Duo as he went to check up on the farm part of his house. Walking into the 10,000 square meter space - he got a good idea of how sick he'd been. Plants were wilted. Whole sections were brown. Several of the tending bots were too broken down to continue work. He coughed, an arm over his face, he also thought something had gone seriously wrong with the mulch system. Julia clung to his leg, face pressed against his jeans.

He ruffled her hair. "Go back upstairs, sweetie. We'll work on your plant lessons after I clean this up, okay?"

"Ponies?"

"Do some math until I come upstairs."

She groaned, staring up at him with big green eyes.

He squatted down, touched a fingertip to the tip of her nose. "Tell you what. You finish the 100th math module and I'll teach you how to make your own pony level. Get them to do anything you want."

"Can I make Rainbow Dash a boy?"

"If you want."

"Can I have an alive pet?"

"We'll talk about it."

"Can I go to school with the other kids?"

"When you are really feeling all better, yes."

"How long? I wanna play with the others."

"I know that Julia. I understand. As soon as you're well enough, we'll get you off to school. Then you're going to complain that you want to stay home. Right now though, go do more math, okay?"

She sighed. "Okay."

Duo watched her trudge into the elevator, then threw his whole effort into fixing up the food production center. Time was easy to lose as he got the bots fixed. He had a lunch of fresh tomatoes, avocado, and strawberries, then put his shoulder to clearing out the corn that hadn't been harvested and had long since turned brown. He had an actual scythe that Wufei had given him as a winter solstice gift one year. The blade was gundanium and illegal as fuck on any other colony. A few rows in, he peeled off his tee shirt, used it to wipe sweat from his face, the back of his neck, then went back to laying the corn over.

He was about half way through, leaning against his scythe, giving serious thought to the idea of making some scarecrows, setting up a holographic bonfire, and getting the kids down to roast marshmallows and fish, when Charlotte found him.

She stared at him, at the solid hard curves of his shoulders and lined abs, dark braid hang down past his ass.

"What?" He asked. "I was a little behind on the upkeep. I guess I wasn't feelin real well for a while."

"Really," she said like he'd just explained that water was oxygen and hydrogen. "The school called. There's a new exchange teacher, up from Earth. Apparently, she and Jacob got into it and she's claiming he assaulted her."

Duo wasn't quite sure how this was Heero's fault, but he was sure it had to be. "'Kay. I'll go talk to her. Don't cook dinner. I'm thinkin we're gonna roast shit down here tonight. I might bring the new teacher. She just gotta getta know us, I'm sure."

Charlotte shook her head vigorously. "I don't think that's a good idea, Duo."

He jumped down from the raised corn bed, his oak and gundanium scythe resting on his shoulders arms hanging over the sides. He winked at her, light violet eyes full of mischief. "You ever see the movie Jeepers Creepers," he asked as he walked away.

"I took twenty first century lit," she said offended.

Walking backwards, he wrinkled his nose and grinned. "I'm just sayin..."

Managing to work for Duo Maxwell for at least a year was really, really good for one's resume. This colony had free education. She really wanted to finish pre-med. Goals! One had to keep one's mind on the goals. "What are you going to do? Oh god!"

An hour later, Duo was cleaned up real good. He wore a dark tailored suit that Wufei had given him. His tie was a vivid blue that had always reminded him of Heero's eyes. His hair was rebraided, with black pearls braided in. Neat black nail polish gave his hands a serious and manicured look. Polished black shoes clicked against the smooth tile of the empty school hallway.

The school had been built on the design of a school Duo had seen in a grainy video he'd found in a damaged library during the war on Earth. He'd never really understood why the movie had been called 'Grease'. The vehicles in it barely counted as mecha, they weren't even the main part of the story and as near as he could no one even had sex it it, so he hadn't understood, but he had liked the love between Sandy and Danny. Heero was definitely the Sandy though. So it was the Rydel Primary school and it went from K through PhD level. It wasn't bad for a small colony.

He stopped in the office to let them know he was there, but it was empty. He didn't think that was a good sign. There were, however, cookies, and he was unreasonably hungry, so he helped himself to two. One went into his mouth like he was Cookie Monster, the other he just carried as he went in search of his kid that didn't make it home.

Duo felt completely whole in the school. There were no echos of any other voices, no hungers that weren't his. It wasn't the first time he'd thought about being a teacher. He went up the stairs three at a time and by the time he got to the top, he was sure it was all just a big misunderstanding.

Jacob was a good kid. He'd been born on a family ship, people who had evaded modern culture. Small ships were really vulnerable though. All kinds of bad shit could happen out living in the rocks. He'd been the only survivor, picked up in a cryopod a dozen years after the loss of his family's ship. The rescue crew dropped him off at L4 and Quatre's people shipped him to Duo.

He'd been with Duo for two years. He'd never had any trouble with Jacob.

Okay, so walking down the hall towards where a group of admin and teachers were clustered by a door. The principal saw Duo and waddled

over to him. "Duo! I'm so glad you're here!"

"What's going on," he asked, taking her hand and shaking warmly, squeezing with reassurance.

"The new Earth History and politics teacher... it's her first day. She's the one we got as an exchange teacher for Hamilton.. He wanted to go down to Earth, you know, just for a year, and well, she's got really offensive ideas! I had NO idea! I swear! Jacob had her class last period and she's claiming he hit her. She says she wants to charge him with assault and is waiting for the police. I told her we don't have police!"

Duo's smile was tight and sharp, his eyes a little darker. "I can be the police. I'll sort it out."

Andie wrapped her arms around Duo's arm, leaning on him a little. "She came with such good recommendations!"

"I'm sure she has many positive qualities," Duo said, patting the principal's hands. "Don't worry. We'll get it all sorted out."

The little cluster of teachers and a couple of students from the student paper parted like the Red Sea. Duo rapped a knuckle on the glass panel of the door. "Comin' in."

The teacher in question was a bean pole of a person in a gray suit, her white hair pulled into a tight bun on top of her head. She wore a little plaid bow tie and sported a nicely progressing black eye. Her arms were crossed over her chest, chin lifted as she eyed Duo. "Are you the police?"

"Kinda," Duo said as he signed his response.

Jacob jumped to his feet, a stocky built boy with mochacino skin and dark angry eyes. He signed a tirade at his dad, hands moving at lightening speed.

Duo nodded, signing slowly in response.

Mouth open the new exchange teacher eyed one then the other. "What are you doing?"

"Asking for his side of the story," Duo said, signing everything he said. "He says you took his tablet and that you shoved him when he tried to take it back. Did you?"

"I don't allow electronic devices in my classroom," she snarled. "Who are you?"

"I'm Duo Maxwell. I'm the mayor and I'm his dad. I'm also what passes for police around here. The safety officers are not going to respond to a call that doesn't have credible threats of actual harm."

"He hit me! I'm going to press charges against him. What ARE you doing with your hands?"

"This is American Sign Language. Oh, and Jacob says you're a racist asshole. I think he might be right," Duo said and signed.

Jacob laughed, the oddest cracked laughter.

The woman moved to put the desk between them. "What is he?"

"He's deaf, ya ignorant log. Haven't you ever met a deaf person before?"

"Goodness no! Why don't you give him appropriate medical care!"

Jacob had moved closer to Duo at that point, signing as he moved.

"I was born into a deaf family," Duo interpreted. "I like how I am. I'm sorry I hit you. I was afraid. May I please have my interpreting device back now?" Duo moved to stand by the kid who was a few inches taller than he was. "I think you should give him back his device."

She pulled it out of a desk drawer and put it on the desk, fingers pulling back like it burned her. "Even if you're sorry, it's still assault."

"It's not like you took any real damage," Duo pointed out. "Go over to the first aid kit and get it fixed."

"A bandage is not going to fix this! I think my eye socket might be fractured!"

"Is she really hurt," Jacob signed worriedly.

"She's fine," Duo said and signed. "Let me show you how to use the first aid kit."

He moved over to the very nondescript little box on the wall. "All rooms have them," he said and signed. "Put any finger on the little square in the center. Come on, try it. I think you'll find it really interesting. You are here to learn about us, right?"

"Poverty stricken savages," she hissed, but moved over to where Duo stood. Angry, she put her finger on the square. The box unfolded like a flower, petals forming and curling open.

"Oh I love this kind," Duo said. "I didn't realize we had any of these in the school! Highest level."

"It's only a blank screen," she mocked him. "What's it going to do, give me positive reinforcement?"

"If you want it to," Duo said, snickering. He pressed his thumb on the pale gray square below the screen. "Full medical assessment and treatment," he commanded.

An image of Galen, the Great Physician appeared. "Greetings, Patient. What is your name."

"Dr. Angela Ledbetter. I don't like AI."

"I see. Is that your complaint today? May I have your permission to scan you, Dr. Ledbetter?"

She crossed her arms over her chest, glared with her one non swollen eye. "Yes. Go on."

"I see that you are in pain. I'm sorry. Pain is always difficult. May I please have your permission to resolve all pain concerns and provide you with optimal health?"

"How are you going to do that from a screen," she snapped.

"I am happy to provide all the details and methods of every treatment I have available to me, but I think it would be easier to understand after you have experienced the treatment first hand. May I please proceed?"

"Yes, fine."

Duo took a step back. Jacob signed that he didn't think this was a good idea. Duo winked, grinning like a maniac. Which if Angela had seen that grin, she might have made some other choice, changed her mind, something.

The first aid kit blinked. A bright light seemed to pop in the air around her.

Jacob signed, "Dad... it's gonna come out bad."

"Nah," Duo signed back, "gonna be fine."

The light was gone and Angela staggered a bit. Duo rushed to catch her and set her down. "Give it a moment. You're all better now."

Dazed, she sat down in her chair... and then she caught sight of her hands. She froze there staring at her outstretched hands. She slowly turned them over, looking at her palms... the smooth skin, healthy skin, creamy and white. After a moment more of staring, she ripped open the drawer, dug into her handbag and found a mirror. The woman staring back at her had no wrinkles, a nice color to her skin, sandy blond hair, thick lashes, soft full red lips, not even the slightest hint of black eye. She dropped the mirror and it shattered into a dozen skidding parts.

She looked up at him, those red lips parted, golden lashes fluttering. "Whaaaaa..."

"Hey there's no bruising now, right? You feel better, doncha? Not bad fer poverty stricken savages, uh?" Duo grinned, pointing at her with both hands. "Don't worry, no medical bills here."

"You're a monster."

"Maybe sometimes," Duo said, going back to speaking and signing again.

Jacob had his device now and it spoke for him, "You don't wanna make him real mad."

"Why... why doesn't it fix him then?" She looked at Jacob, looked back at Duo.

"Because there's nothing wrong with me. You didn't like being old, or Galen wouldn't have fixed it."

"Old is natural! Natural!"

Duo had lost all sense of wearing a fine suit and looking proper. Jacket unbuttoned, hands shoved deep in his pockets, the jacket bunching around his arms, he shrugged, "So. Hey, to like welcome you to Camelot.L2, I was thinking I might invite you over for dinner. I was thinking we could roast marshmallows and fish, do a Jeepers Creepers theme. Wanna come over for dinner then?"

"NO. No, I do not want to come over for dinner," she said, eyes wide, a pained grin pasted on her face. "Thank you so much for the offer."

"Well, some other time then," Duo said. "Me and Jacob gotta go now, but just to be sure, we're all good now, right?"

"Yeah, yeah, everything's fine. Thanks for, uh," she said, hands gripping the arms of her chair, "Coming in for such a lovely parent teacher conference. Anytime."

Galen, who hadn't been shut back down, frowned. "I sense you are getting a headache. May I apply follow up treatment?"

"No!" Angela nearly screamed, grabbing her handbag and half running for the door.

Duo followed her out the door and stood with the school staff as he scratched the back of his head. "She's a strange one, alright."

The student reporter slipped up close to him. "Mayor Maxwell, would you like to give a statement?"

"Oh sure," he turned to Jacob and signed, "Is it okay if I tell them?"

Jacob nodded, smiling brightly.

"Jacob has been accepted to pre-law, starting next year, on Paris.L1. I'm extremely proud of him."

"Oh that's great!" Sam, the reporter, said, "Good job," he signed in Jacob's direction.

Jacob beamed. Duo signed, "See? I told you it would come out great."

4. Chapter 4

A Wrench to the Heart 4/?

By Max

Disclaimer: I don't own Gundam Wing

Warning: Mention of suicide attempt

Duo knew he was dreaming. In the dream he stood on a great open blue plain. The horizon existed only because his mind said there must be one. The smooth surface was chill to his bare feet. His blue jeans hung around slender hips. His braid swung over bare shoulder blades. He knew what these dreams meant.

Sometimes though, sometimes he could find Heero in these dreams. He turned slowly around. It wasn't real. He knew it wasn't real. It was just a dream.

In it though, he could let go of all the fears, let go of all the energy it took to be normal and not scare the people around him. In here, he had no responsibility for anyone other than himself. He wasn't sure when he'd started running, but he ran. The power in his body at its best gave him stride and power. It wasn't like running in the wars when he was constantly hungry and frightened. This was a man running, running towards because sometimes in these dreams he could find Heero.

The sound of a train cut the silence. It wasn't a train like his colony had, not the quaint Victorian looking trains, but a modern subway kind of train. "Heero!"

They'd been lovers, fuck buddies really, in the wars. Secret. Neither had said it was more than that. Duo wasn't sure just when it had gone from the very wild and wicked temptation of having someone else wrap gentle hand around his cock to having Heero's love wrapped around his heart. There was a moment, after Heero had shot down that damn shuttle, when he'd been vulnerable, cracked in some way, but Duo remembered Heero looking at him like, like something he hadn't understood at the time, but it was from that moment that Duo's own spirit had started to heal. It was in that moment that he'd understood someone else could love him. He might be a worthless rat, but he was a loveable rat.

He didn't remember when he stopped running. Sweat ran down his back and he leaned over, hands on his slightly bent knees. It wasn't real. It was just a dream. God, he had more control over his everyday life than he had over his dreams. But then he saw the train.

Just some ordinary subway, nothing special, just kind of grubby and grey where it might have once been white. Heero stood on the platform with a bunch of other people. All of them were just ordinary people, Duo wanted to run so badly, but he found his legs could barely walk now. As he walked, he sank slowly into the chill blue of the ground. That train pulled away. Heero flicked his hand and a small screen popped up. He tapped away at it.

Duo felt like he was sinking. Fog rose around him, choking him, but he reached and pushed, until he was crawling and sinking.

The moment he touched Heero's pant leg, he was suddenly back on his feet, the fog gone.

The man looked at him... just some man.. But he looked out of Heero's face, Heero's eyes. Duo's heart felt crushed.

"Heero?"

But unlike the past, this dream Heero didn't see him. Didn't respond

to him. Panic grabbed Duo then and he feared... what he feared most was that he was going to let Heero go. Suddenly the train became a metaphor and Duo grabbed at Heero's arms, wanting to shake him, making see him, make him stay! "Heero! Don't go! Okay? I get it! I know I'm just... I'm just dreaming and you're not really in my dreams, but I need you to stay! Do you understand? Baby! I love you!"

His Heero didn't pay any attention to him though, just kept typing on his screen. Duo finally looked at that and it was really detailed for a dream. AlexanderTanaka Sorento. . Duo tilted his head. The email wasn't anything particular. So the new textbook was acceptable. Sincerely. Alexander.

Really?

Only then did Heero turn to look at him. Duo's breath caught by how intense and real the connection was when Heero looked at him. "I'll never really let you go. You'll always live in my thoughts and my heart!"

Heero smiled softly, the soft and genuine smile that Heero had when it was just the two of them.

"Wild nights - Wild nights!

Were I with thee

Wild nights should be

Our luxury!

Futile - the winds -

To a Heart in port -

Done with the Compass -

Done with the Chart!

Rowing in Eden -

Ah - the Sea!

Might I but moor - tonight -

In thee!1"

"What the hell, Heero? What does that mean?" Duo leaned closer though, feeling completely connected to Heero, not caring if it was only a dream. He'd just stay right there and never wake up again. "I'll stay here with you. We can stay here together."

Just before his lips touched Heero's, before he completely committed to never leaving the dream, a scream ripped through the hallway. His eyes were open and he was out of bed before he was fully awake.

Charlotte ran to him. "Duo! There's an intruder! There's a ghost!"

Duo's heart rate dropped back to normal. "Seriously? I was having a really good dream."

"No. No... I ... the door I'm not supposed to touch! I ... heard crying.. And I know you said never to try to open it.. But I did... and that's when I saw her! Oh my god... What happened in this house?"

Duo rolled his eyes. "No, really. Seriously? You said you were atheist in our interview. A ghost is your best explanation?"

"It was the girl from the Ring! I know what I saw!"

Duo grunted, realized he was standing naked in the hall and rubbed between his eyes. "No. You don't. Don't completely flip yer nut. Let me put some pants on. I'll show you."

"You're not leaving me out here in the hall alone!"

Duo threw a hand up in the air and let her follow him back into his room. "There is always, always a rational explanation for everything."

"I thought.. You believed in God during the wars. What happened?"

Duo pulled on a pair of grey sweat pants. "I grew the fuck up. Come on."

"So... what's in there," she said, following behind him as if he were a suitable human shield against vengeful spirits.

"One of my earliest kids... She was a burn victim."

"Did she die," Charlotte said, her hands touching Duo's bare shoulders.

"She tired," Duo admitted, entering the security code for the door at the end of the hall. "Try not to scream again. It bothers her."

"Bothers her," Charlotte complained, hiding behind Duo as he opened the door.

"Hey, Julia. It's just me. Ima turn the lights on."

"No." Julia, his little pony playing girl said in her normal voice. "I don't wanna see."

"Well, then close your eyes, Sweetie. You scared the shit out of Charlie and you know better."

"Ohhhhhh," she complained as the lights came on. "But I did my math!"

The room was small, but filled with life support equipment. There was a fairly large sphere, large enough to hold a full grown man, but the person inside was burned terribly, without limbs, floating in a clear gel, but at least a late teen sized body.

Charlotte stepped around Duo, starrng. "What happened?"

Julia, young Julia, ran to Duo and he picked her up, as if she were made of flesh and blood. Today her hair was red curls again, green eyes.

"Julia had a bad day, but she's feeling a little better every day!"

"But! Why can't you just... It would only take a moment to just... the Galen system. It would heal her in a blink!"

"Charlie," Duo said gently, his hand petting Julia's hair, soothing her. "It's not the body that's hurt. It's the mind."

"I'm going to go to school soon," Julia said firmly. "Can I sleep with you tonight, Daddy?"

"Sure, Sweetie," Duo said. "Julia can take whatever form she wants. When you tried to get into her room, she was just trying to scare you away."

Thumb in her mouth, she lifted her head. "Was I scary?"

"Very much so! Don't do that again." Charlotte put her hands on her hips and glared.

"Okay. I'm sorry."

"I didn't mean to scare you," Charlotte said, turning her back to the broken body and focusing on the little girl in Duo's arms. "I will never hurt you."

"I afraid you'd think I'm ugly."

"I did wonder how your hair changed color," Charlotte said playfully. "If you can look like anything you want, why do you never be Rainbow Dash?"

"I'm not a pony," Julia said. "I'm a little boy."

"Really," Charlotte said, blinking. "You're a boy?"

"Yeah," Julia said, snuggling against Duo.

"Come on," Duo said, herding Charlotte out. "Go back to bed. Don't pry into things I didn't offer to share. Some things around here are actually dangerous, Charlie. There are things that medical tech can't bring you back from." He carried Julia into his room, shut the door, leaving Charlotte to just... live with the echos of the very real seeming ring girl.

Julia curled up and he tucked her in, rubbing her back until she fell asleep. He snuggled down into his blankets and pillows, wondering... about Alexander Tanaka. He wanted to fall back into the same dream... to finish that kiss. If Heero were alive, even if he had to hide, he'd have reached out. He'd have contacted him... somehow. Duo never made any sound when he cried.

5. Chapter 5

A Wrench to the Heart 5/?

By Max

Disclaimer: I don't own Gundam Wing

Charlotte's room was nice. That had surprised her. She'd honestly expected to arrive on Camelot.L2 and find some barely habitable hamster wheel. The thing was she desperately wanted to go to medical school on L4 and it was ungodly hard to get into, but if one could pass pre-med on Camelot.L2 AND work for Duo Maxwell for a year, then, her advisor promised her, the Quatre Rabera Winner would write a personal recommendation letter and you were a shoe in. With a medical degree out of Main.L4, she could write her ticket anywhere in the solar system, go to any new colony, a deep space ship, even a post on Earth - if she wanted. She did want, but a month into her contract with the Maxwell household there hadn't been a day when she wasn't sure if she was going to make a year here.

It was like Jane Eyre, except there were a lot more kids, the locked up person could float down the hall like a ghost, and the head of household was both gay as shit and crazy as shit. It was just... there wasn't another way to both get into medical school and be able to afford medical school.

She lay in her bed staring at the ceiling comparing how she thought it was going to be to how it was. So it was supposed to be a 45 year old war Heero who lost the love of his life and has since devoted his life to helping difficult children in a world where difficult is not well tolerated. So cook some meals, change some diapers, study a lot, maybe listen to the old man talk about his lost love. She thought there would be a lot of nodding. She thought this year was going to be mostly boring and repetitive.

Instead her boss looked like a teenager and acted younger, on occasion. Once he'd looked at her and his eyes had been dark as wine, his smile psychotic. This was so far from The Sound of Music that she was pretty sure she'd fallen into Alice in Wonderland and the Mad Hatter was well and truly mad and some of the mice at his table were scary as fuck.

She closed her eyes and mouthed, "Medical school, medical school, medical school."

Then the scent of something burning flooded her mind with adrenaline and she was up out of bed, hair in a lion's mane around her head, white nightgown fluttering around her bare legs as she ran down stairs. She burst through the swinging double doors, eyes wide, smoke around her like a halo.

The kids were all at the huge table, plates and cups in front of them. They all stared at her like she had lost her mind. Duo was at the stove, a chef hat on, apron slightly asque, and a huge grin on his face. The griddle was humming along with another six pancakes, half of them flipped and a lovely golden brown. He pointed the spatula at her. "Good morning, Miss Charlie! You're up a little early. Super hungry today? I've been real hungry the last week."

Her face was long, her expression dumbstruck, then one eyebrow slowly arched. "Did you burn some pancakes?"

"Oh, no. I was just teaching how to put out a fire." He pointed the spatula at a metal trash container that clearly was never going to be used again. "Good experience!"

She blinked. She blinked again. Her jaw hurt from all the things she was not staying to this man who was, despite all reason, apparently, a very important man in the scheme of Earthsphere politics. "You - intentionally - set an actual fire in a metal can on a space colony? Intentionally?"

"Yeah," Duo said, flipping the pancakes off onto a plate for Clara to take and give out to the kids. "On purpose and everything. Fires'er very dangerous. Got to know how to take care'em."

"They're children! They don't put out fires! We have fire specialists to put out fires!"

Duo picked up a pancake, took a bite of it, as he stared at her, perhaps waiting for her to come to her senses. "Wul. Here...we all put out fires. Can't never tell when you'll be on a ship somewhere and it's you and the fire. Fire's bad. It wants the O2 more than we do sometimes." He dipped his pancake in syrup, sprayed whipped cream on it, took a huge bite, and watched her think about what he said.

"You can't expect children to put out fires!" She protested, feet apart, hands on her hips.

"I expect them to live," Duo said firmly, eyes narrowing, darkening a little. "I expect them to crawl their burning asses to a life pod and survive, because that's what we do, don't we?" He looked at the table. The kids all nodded. Julia's avatar caught fire and ran screaming into the backyard, but not real flames and she was clearly playing, arms over her head, running around the swing set screaming. Duo watched her out the window for a bit, lips kind of pursed, until he was satisfied that she wasn't actually upset. "Okay! Who wants ice cream?"

Her bare foot tapped against the floor. This wasn't Alice in Wonderland! It was Peter Pan and somehow, she, the girl who ran away to be a personal assistant for a crazy man and his dozen kids was cast as Wendy, the responsible one. The world was inside out. "Have you lost your bleeding mind? Don't give kids ice cream for breakfast!"

Duo rolled his eyes. "Ice cream and cake. I learned that on Earth. It's a great Earth delicacy!"

"Ice cream! Ice cream! Ice cream!" The table denizens chanted.

Duo pointed to a spot. "Sit down Charlie. You need to eat too. We'll all need the calories. We're going camping. You'll burn up all these calories, no problem!"

She gave up and sat where he said and he set a plate of four huge pancakes, with syrup, eggs, peanut butter, whipped cream, and vanilla

ice cream in front of her. "Gotta eat when you can!"

"Duo," she said, voice low. "May I speak with you privately?"

While she was speaking, Julia came back in, her hair fried and matted, her cheeks blistered. She grabbed onto Duo's leg, holding him tight. "Yeah, yeah, Charlie, gimme a minute." He went to one knee. "Hey Sweetie."

"Is okay?" Julia said, tears slipping down her burned face.

"It's okay. You're okay. I'm very proud of you. It's very hard, I know. Want some ice cream?"

"Yes, please," she said and he picked her up, depositing her on the bench next to Charlotte.

"Okay, Miss Charlie, please come into mah office," Duo said, playing up an accent he didn't really have.

Big eyes looked at each other around the table. As soon as the door closed to the walkin. Jacob signed and his translator spoke in hushed tones, "Are they going to fight?"

Saphron, a girl with dark skin, one eye dreadlocks shook her head. She'd been at Duo's house for five years. In two more, she'd be and adult. "No. This happens almost every year, if the assistant is going to stay. They flip out. He reminds them of their terms and conditions and they settle down. Charlie's been her too long for her to quit now."

"She only been here a month," Mark pointed out.

"One year, we went through ten assistants before we got one that stuck it out. There was one I didn't like. She was damn hard to get rid of," Saphron boasted.

"So what is this camping thing?" Mark asked, picking at his food. He was a skinny kid who barely looked his 13 years. He'd come from L3. No one knew quite why he was there and he wasn't talking about it.

"We do it every year. It's the anniversary of Heero Yuy's funeral." Saphron said, spearing another pancake from the main plate. "We're gonna walk till we die."

"I don't wanna die," Alexander said stubbornly, a bit of whipped cream on his nose. "Dead people stink."

There was a general agreement on that, nodding and wrinkled noses.

Saphron poured a bit more orange juice. "We're not really gonna die. We're gonna walk like twenty miles. The really little kids all get to go in a wagon. The Forest is like... done like real Earth stuff. I saw a real bear in there one year. It's some real shit."

Once they were behind the closed metal door, she smacked the back of her hand against her palm, looking up at him as if he were a small child and she was going to put him right, one way or the other. "I

will have you know that I studied for two years in anticipation of taking this position! I studied early childhood education and diplomacy! I accepted room and board in exchange for my efforts around the clock for a full year. I understood before I got here that you were... eccentric! You are beyond the bounds on all acceptable parenting technique! You sir are no Duo Maxwell and you should try to follow the rules a little more!"

Duo had his normal speech all planned out. It had worked a dozen times, with slight modifications. His mouth just hung a little open now though because no one had ever accused him of being not Duo Maxwell. Folk had accused him of many things, most fairly well credible, but never of not being quite good enough to be Duo Maxwell. "Ya wanna leave?"

"No!" She said, arms across her chest, "I just... there has to be more structure. I need no more surprises. You can't keep secrets like one of the kids might turn into a vengeful ghost at any moment and where do you think you're taking a group of kids like this into some park somewhere?"

"What'cha mean a group'o kids like these ones?" Duo asked, eyes narrowing, as he considered that maybe he'd ask her to leave.

"But," she paused, sensing she was getting into dangerous territory. "It's just... most ... in most places... children shouldn't be allowed to decline medical care."

"So you think people should be forced into something and lose all that they are," Duo asked, his own arms across his chest.

"Well, when the are that disconnected from their body... Sometimes trauma is best... released."

"You're not going to be a good fit here. You want to go to university on Main.L4. I'll arrange transport."

"No way," she said, chin lifted, "I'm not leaving before my year is over. It won't hurt you to hear some outside opinions! I won't challenge you or undermine you! I want to support you. Even in the month I've been here I've seen that you do wonderful work with the kids. I just ... I don't like feeling so out of control. Julia scared me to death last night! Give me a little space!"

"You're the one that wanted to talk privately," Duo pointed out. "I just made you breakfast, that's all."

'You didn't make a breakfast! You made a dietary apocalypse! Their blood sugars are going to go insane! I can't eat that kind of food. It'll kill you!"

"Nonsense," Duo said, wiggling his nose. "We'll walk it off. I always do this on this day."

She closed her eyes for a moment. "On International Heero Yuy day, you take your kids and go walking?"

"Yup. No electronics, no cell signal for 48 hours," Duo grinned. "It's gonna be amazing!" Duo touched the sides of his fingers to his forehead and then pointed at her.

"It's gonna be a nightmare," she whispered.

"So? You going to The Forest or are you going to Main.L4?"

"The Forest."

And then the doorbell rang...

6. Chapter 6

A Wrench to the Heart 6/?

By Max

Disclaimer: I don't own Gundam Wing

Duo grabbed the silly chef hat from his head and stomped to the frontdoor. Hair wild standing on end and lightly covered in pancake mix, he pulled open the door and glared. "What do you want?"

Dr. Angela Ledbetter smiled, a tray of candy apples held in both hands. As she stared at Duo her expression transitioned from forced cheerfulness to complete bewilderment. "Dr. Maxwell... I.. I thought we might not have gotten off to a great start. I understand it's a holiday on Camelot... to celebrate the life of Heero Yuy and I thought I might come by and spend some time with you and the kids."

They stared at each other for a moment.

She smiled nervously.

He took a slow breath. He had not slept enough. He had to have the 'are you staying or going' conversation with the new assistant and it was the day everyone talked about Heero Yuy. 'I don't think he's really dead,' was like the last thing one could say today and if he was anywhere near any kind of a messaging system, he was going to have all kinds of questions he didn't want to answer. "Yeah. It's a holiday. We're going camping."

"How lovely! I love camping! Is there a place to fish, as well?" Her smile became genuine and confident. "Have you ever been to Earth?"

Duo rolled his eyes. "Yes. Yes, I have. It was an experience I'll never forget."

"May I please come with you? Maybe we can talk about Earth?"

"No talking about Earth," Duo said firmly. "You can come. Might as well. Do you like pancakes, Dr. Ledbetter?"

"I do! Let me cook! You don't look like you've eaten yet." She pushed her tray of candied apples into his hands "I think you're really doing amazing work. Your name sake would be so proud!" She smiled, waiting for his permission to talk over the kitchen.

Duo's thoughts went to Father Maxwell and the man's guidance and

leadership. In that moment, remembering the older priest was only pleasant. Duo smirked, smiled, shrugged. "Okay. Fine. You can make me breakfast. We're walking today though, gonna be walking ten miles in, and back. No data connection, other than the first aid kit, and I don't let anyone else know I'm bringing that."

"Sounds very intense, but that's okay with me. What do you like to be called. When I'm not at school, I liked to be called Angela, okay?"

"Yeah, sure thing, Angela. I'm Duo. Pretty much everyone calls me Duo."

"Very nice to actually meet you, Duo. I'm sorry about my first impression. It was stupid of me," Angela said.

Duo motioned towards the kitchen. "I'ma take a moment and I'll be right there."

Duo closed the bathroom door and leaned on it. He wanted the day to stop right there. It had started out well enough and he'd had real high hopes, been very excited about it. Walking all day and showing the kids plants, bugs, fishing, looking at stars, and just not being in the greater world for a couple of days. After a moment of leaning against the bathroom door, he opened up the first aid kit, "Low nag," he whispered and the screen resolved into Heero's face. "Tell me I'm doing okay."

"Hi Duo," the AI said in Heero's 15 year old voice, "You're doing good. I'm proud of you."

"Do you still love me?"

"I'm only a simulation, Duo."

"Fuck it. Tell me you love me anyway or that I'm loveable that it's good I'm alive. Do you think the real Heero could have loved me?"

"As far as I understand human intentions, I believe he intended to form a long term relationship with you. I have found a receipt for a ring in your size that he purchased three months prior to his last known contact. The ring was never picked up, but your name is also on the receipt."

"Why didn't you tell me about this before," Duo demanded, hands on the wall to the sides of the drab looking med kit.

"You didn't ask a question to which that was a plausible answer."

"What is a connection between Heero and the poet Emily Dickinson?"

"I don't know of any connection between them. You might ask Relena. She has his effects and two books by Emily Dickinson were listed as property transferred to her."

"Dat so," Duo said, "Thanks, Heero." Duo said, fingers brushing over the smooth screen.

The feeling when things were going to fuzzy always started like a buzz in his mind, like the air was a little too thin to really work in his lungs. He pressed his fingers to his temples. "Stop. Just calm down, calm down," he whispered.

He blinked and he was in a hotel room. The air was drier, purer. He wasn't on Camelot.L2. Head spinning, he sat down on the bed and ran both hands through his hair. The hotel wasn't the best, wasn't completely skanky either. Written on the mirror, in blue marker, "Alexander Tanaka."

The flashback swallowed him and he was at the camp ground, back against his favorite big rock. On the surface, he'd been chipper and charming all day, teaching plant recognition, biology, evolution, survival, how to purify water, and by the end of the day, he'd set up the nice temporary shelters he'd build for each of them. One good thing about getting them to walk so far was that they were all out like rocks, or so he thought. He hadn't had a shelter for Angela, so he'd given her his and he honestly expected her to be in it. So he thought he was alone when he had the breakdown. He turned the first aid box, back against that rock, thinking he'd just get simulated Heero to talk to him.

Angela wasn't in the shelter though. She was standing right beside him and the only thing prevented her from getting her nosy ass shot was that Duo hadn't carried a gun in a long time.

"I know him. That's Professor Tanaka. I met him when I did an exchange into the L1 cluster. Nice, man, brilliant, doesn't talk much."

Duo felt all over the sense of being reborn in the flashback that he'd had the moment she said it. "That's Heero Yuy."

"Oh there might be some resemblance. All the photos from that period always show him so much more dignified and noble."

"Ya think so?" Duo asked, remembering a time when he caught Heero picking his nose. "Nobel, uh?"

"It was a different time," she said.

From that moment, to making sure the kids were taken care of, getting passage, getting through immigration on this upstart L1 donut - he'd actually had to call Quatre to get him to apply pressure on L1 immigration. As it was, they gave him a three day visa. So they were still a little mad about that protest to draw attention to Heero not being dead. Just because there had been public nudity and he took over the colony's media outlets for nearly an hour. That was at least twenty some odd years before. They really ought to be more forgiving.

By the time his thoughts cleared enough to function enough again, he'd lost another hour. According to his calendar, he had twelve hours before his visa expired and they were after him. And they would be.

The local map though was good enough to give him the address for one Professor Alexander Tanaka. Duo ran out the door. He'd run all the

way if he had to. Once Heero saw him! He'd remember... he'd explain! Everything would be okay!

7. Chapter 7

A Wrench to the Heart 7/?

By Max

Disclaimer: I don't own Gundam Wing

Warning: Duo's having quite a break down. There will be law enforcement.

Duo didn't actually run all the way to Alexander Tanaka's house. He caught a public light rail and then a ride share. Nothing moved fast enough. As he ran down the street towards Tanaka's house, towards Heero's house... his mind was too filled with light to think clearly. Love made his heart hurt. Reality bent.

The moment he actually laid eyes on Heero's house, then he wasn't on the colony at all. He was on the boarding deck of a cruiseliner. There were pretty Japanese lanterns swinging in a virtual breeze and a sweep of Milky Way above them, muted and glittering like it looked through Earth's atmosphere, though he knew they were boarding off of Main.L1. He was walking backwards swaying his hips to the Hawaiian music and Heero was only a step behind him.

Heero's hair was longer, pulled into a ponytail. He was taller than wartime Heero, the Heero that Duo normally remembered. Duo knew he'd sank down on the grass in front of Alexander Tanaka's house and he tried really, really hard to keep aware of both realities. On the lawn, he held his head with both hands, on the boarding deck, he held out both hands to Heero, felt those strong warm hands take his and pull him close.

Heero pulled him close, arms around him, those smooth thin lips against his ear, "My life would not be worth living without you."

And with that, Duo lost all connection to the lawn, to anything outside of Heero's arms. "Don't let me go, Heero. I'm so scared. I think I'm losing my mind."

"Don't be afraid," Heero said, tugging Duo's braid gently. "This is it. We're getting this trip. No more politics. No more war. No more interference. Just you and me. We're going to build a new life."

Tears ran down his face, which was the lawn experience leeching into the ship experience. "Don't leave me, Heero. Don't let me go!"

The boarding deck reached the highest point and Heero turned Duo around, hands on his shoulders. "Don't be nervous. Everything is going to work out."

The ship's name was written in great black and gold letters, elegant and antique-y. "The Rage."

Duo wanted to fight, dig in his heels, not get on the ship, but he was walking forward, laughing in the one experience, crying in the other. Staff members reached out grab his hands, shaking, welcoming him, "Welcome aboard Dr. Maxwell, Commander Yuy! We're so happy to have you with us! Congratulations!"

"Are you alright?" Heero asked, much more irritated and matter of fact than the Heero holding onto his shoulders, who he desperately wanted to Heero what Heero was saying. It was important. It was so important. It sounded like... "Soon this will be real," in Heero's words, whispered in his ear, but Heero was also picking him up.

"I love you," Duo whispered.

"Oh, yes, I do remember you," Heero said as he carried him.

Duo wrapped his arms around Heero's shoulders, buried his face against Heero's neck. This was so much better than any memory. "Heero! I found you!"

"Try to stay calm," Heero said, soothing, authoritarian, confident. "You're having some kind of seizure. I've already called emergency response. They should be here shortly," Heero continued as he set Duo down on his couch.

"No.. No! I'm not having a seizure. You're Heero Yuy! I'm Duo Maxwell."

Heero squatted down in front of him, not trying to get his hands back. "My name is Alexander Tanaka. I teach astronautics at University L1 now. I'm only 45. I've never met Duo Maxwell," Alexander said gently. "You were here twenty years ago and I remember you from that. You look exactly the same."

"Technology and medical science," Duo said, feeling grounded now, some sense of wholeness returning to him. He reached out very cautiously to touch a small scar on Heero's face. "I gave you that, but you don't remember, do you? Do remember being on The Rage?"

Alexander leaned into Duo's touch, just slightly, blue eyes confused. "I was on The Rage. It was a graduation present from my dad. My parents are coming up next week, from to celebrate my promotion. I'm really sorry that I'm not the man you're looking. Anyone would be lucky to have you look at them with that much love."

"But... you are," Duo said scooting a little closer. "Look.. we were both on The Rage. I remember being on it with you. Something happened on that ship. Come to Camelot.L2. You can teach there. You'll remember."

Alexander stood up and took a step back. "After you came the last time, I looked up Heero Yuy's life. He had a miserable life. He was deranged and suicidal. I have family. I have a nephew. I don't have nightmares. I don't take dangerous jobs. I bicycle to work and lecture intelligent students. I'm not Heero Yuy. I've never killed anyone. I've never piloted a Gundam. I'm Professor Alexander Tanaka and there is no way I'd move into the L2 cluster," he said, wrinkling his nose.

"Well...what I stayed here with you for a little while? I'll call you Alexander? I can get a job. I'm a doctor. I can get my license back. We can...date?"

"I would like you to consider that you're stalking me. I think you might be schizophrenic. You need help, not a date. Look, I don't mean to hurt your feelings, but I'd like it if you didn't come back to my house. I have a good life. You should go have a good life. Your Heero wouldn't want you to chase after ghosts."

"You're wrong," Duo said, trying really hard not to cry. "Maybe you're not my Heero. My Heero would know that I would never stop looking for him. I would never abandon him, even if he asked me to. My Heero would never give up on who he was to live a comfortable lie."

"I'm not your Heero," Alexander said apologetically. "I kind of wish I was."

Duo stood up, willing his body to be relaxed, non-threatening. Heero had often been a bit jump at times of stress. "Kiss me."

"What?" Alexander asked, arching an eyebrow in a very Heero sign of irritation.

"I said... kiss me. You're not Heero and it won't make any difference, right? You know you want to," Duo said, cajoling just the way that used to work so well with Heero."

Alexander took a small step closer, a bit more color in his face. "Why would I kiss you? I don't want to take advantage of you when you clearly are mentally unstable," but he kept moving closer as he spoke until his last words were spoken brushing against Duo's lips.

Duo held perfectly still as if a butterfly were landing on his lips. An electric butterfly. He hadn't realized he'd closed his eyes until their lips touched and both of them had their wide open, blue into violet. Alexander's hand flew into Duo's hair, fingers sinking into the warm brown tangles left from racing halfway across the colony. Those fingers pressed, pulling Duo to him and the kiss that started out a brush of butterfly turned into a shooting star, burning into each other as their tongues caressed, danced, so familiar...

Euphoria breathed into Duo's being, a joy at coming home, that all the wishes he'd ever had were fulfilled. Heero's kiss, touch, acceptance. Another flashback hit him like ice water and he went limp in Heero's arms. They were in the stateroom... beautiful room... surreal. Heero smiled, this loving beautiful smile. "I didn't know you... actually liked me back."

Everything was so out of joint, so crazy... but instead of responding to Heero's admission, Duo spun towards their stateroom door, his hand on a pistol holstered at the small of his back. The doorknob rattled and then he screamed. The scream filled Alexander's little house until Duo ran out of breath. Shaking hard, he was only still on his feet because of Heero's hands on his arms.

"Your eyes are bleeding," Heero/Alexander said horrified.

"Cool," Duo whispered before passing out.

Alexander paced in the insane man's hospital room. L1 was not charitable, per se. L1 used a market economy and they expected to be paid in currency. The bursar's office for Camelot.L2 which was officially listed as an educational station, offered payment in natural natural resources, freshly mined or synthesized. Apparently Duo's weight in gold was not sufficient to pay for his medical care. The hospital administrator had made it abundantly clear that the moment Alexander walked out of the room or fell asleep, they were putting the illegal alien, whose visa was now well and truly expired, into an emergency medical transport and shooting him back to Camelot.

The deposit that they required to secure Duo's care required that Alexander take out a mortgage on his house, which to his great surprise, he was actually eager to do. He had no sane way to explain why the care of some deranged savage from the L2 cluster, why this man's well being mattered to him, but it did. Why it mattered enough to be willing to pay for the man's well being with his house, he really did not understand. He knew nothing about him, other than he'd found his way to his house twice and made insane claims.

Poor insane man.

Alexander touched fingertips to his lips and remembered that kiss though. It was the first kiss he'd ever had and it felt like a kiss he'd always known. It felt like the kiss he'd been waiting for, why nothing else had ever been good enough to even try.

8. Chapter 8

A Wrench to the Heart 8/?

By Max

Disclaimer: I don't own Gundam Wing.

The door opened and Alexander moved to stand by the bed, glaring. "My financing will come through," he challenged, arms across his chest.

"That is not going to be necessary," Quatre said. His attendant pushed his wheelchair in. She was a tall woman in a face scarf, and modest clothing that were clearly designed to not restrict her movements should there be conflict. "I have resolved the financial concerns."

Alexander's blue eyes narrowed at the strange man. He was so old, older than old, and yet there was something familiar about him, so familiar the deja vu gave him nausea. "Do I know you?"

"Yes, and no," Quatre said, moving around the other side of the bed. It took him a moment to get his hands onto the bed so he could take hold of Duo's hand, rubbing the back with his thumb. "I really should have known better."

"Do you know what's wrong with him," Alexander asked. He could leave now, he told himself. The man's family was here. He didn't need to

stay anymore. He took a deep breath and accepted it... he was not going to leave. He didn't want to leave. A new understanding of the world settled into him and he knew he would be resigning the job he'd been working towards for ten years. He'd be moving the wilds of L2. Maybe insanity was contagious.

"Not completely, but enough to start finding a solution, if there is one. You can go now, if you like. I'll make sure he's taken care of. I'm sorry he bothered you."

"No," Alexander said, sitting down in the closest chair. "Tell me about him."

Quatre leaned back in his chair and his attendant reached out to lift Duo's limp hand back onto the hospital bed.

"He's reckless," Quatre said, bent old fingers lacing together under his chin. "He's loyal. He's as old I am, but he loves technology and we were able to arrest his aging many years ago. He has a brain tumor caused by use of an illegal brain altering device. It was an act of violence and my family will pursue his attackers until the universe is no more. He and I were in the war together and he is as much my family as anyone who bears my blood."

While Quatre had been speaking, Alexander stood and paced slowly, filled with nervous energy he didn't understand. "I'm Professor Alexander Tanaka. Why does he think I'm Heero Yuy?"

Quatre took a deep breath, leaned back. His attendant rubbed his temples gently and he sat there for a what felt like a horrible amount of time to Alexander. "L1 is so self righteous. They won't let me smoke, no matter who I am."

"And who are you?" Alexander snapped. He could remember this man. He knew this man. It was there, right there, just at the edge of his mind, but it fell off the edge like the edge of the known world fell away and there were only sea monsters past that thought. It was almost physically painful.

"I am Quatre Raberba Winner. Amira, close the door. Do not let anyone enter."

Her dark eyes eyed Alexander as if she weren't sure if she were going to kill him rather than leave him alone with her boss. She pulled a small embroidered bag from the storage space under his seat and held it out to him. "Master."

"Alexander is not a risk."

The woman bowed and moved to close and guard the door.

"Come help me with this," Quatre stated, his bent fingers having trouble opening the bag.

Alexander rolled his eyes, but moved to be helpful. He leaned over and opened the handmade little bag. Inside was a custom golden vaporizer. "If you turn this on, they will be in here to throw us both out, and then they will ship Duo in a glorified escape pod."

"They will not," Quatre said, smiling as he lit up his vaporizer. "Their security staffing company was very recently acquired by someone with a keen interest and all of the staff have been withdrawn and forbidden from this floor. My personal security staff will support this floor while I'm here. In fifteen minutes, my medical staff will be here and we will remove Duo and take him home."

"And he won't be back?"

"He probably will. I've built him a very nice fishbowl, but he's very hard to contain."

"Maybe he could ... just stay here?"

Quatre took a very long slow draw on his vaporizer. "He runs a group home for children who do not fit well into the system. There are twelve, thirteen, something like that. They would never survive here and he will never leave them permanently, not even for you."

"What does he need to be well?" Alexander moved to the foot of the bed where he touched the edge of Duo's foot, like he was touching a door that he hadn't opened in a very great deal of time.

"Is it something I can give him?"

"Not as far as I know. What I know is that he and Heero were on The Rage. Heero was a Preventer and Duo had been serving in the medical corps of the Preventers. They were working on a missing persons case. The Rage was destroyed on that voyage with a loss of nearly five hundred passengers and crew."

"They say that Heero Yuy died on that flight," Alexander said, staggering a little to sit down in a chair by the window.

"That is what they say," Quatre said softly. "On that flight, attackers attempted to overwrite Duo's memories and personality with data of their choice. The attempt failed. However the malicious patterning can not be removed without the original encryption key."

"Is that what happened to..." Alexander turned to look at his reflection in the mirror for a moment, "Is that what happened to Heero Yuy?"

Quatre took another long inhale on his vape. From the sounds of it, there were several medical people and several of Quatre's personal security outside were having strongly worded conversations outside the door. "From what we were able to understand, Heero Yuy's mind was completely reformatted."

"If he was," Alexander said softly, "alive... and you had the encryption key... could you put him back to being him?"

"We don't have Heero's mind file. Duo has his mind file. It's corrupt, but it's present. Heero's gone."

"Forever," Alexander ask, feeling an overwhelming sadness without any reason he understood.

"If I kiss him again, will he die?"

"I don't know," Quatre said softly. "I suspect he might die if you don't, but it'll take longer."

"I'm Heero Yuy," Alexander said, trying to see if that felt true.

"You have his body, anyway." Quatre said. "You have a nice life, Alexander. You've been happy. Duo's life is chaotic and occasionally dangerous. His life is not professorial, if you know what I mean."

"And until the moment I kissed him," Alexander said, relieved that he was saying it out loud, "I was dead."

9. Chapter 9

A Wrench to the Heart 9/?

Disclaimer: I don't own Gundam Wing.

Note: OH man.. I struggled with this chapter.

The house was set fairly far back from all the other houses. It didn't really seem like a presidential mansion or any such status place, but in the context of the colony, Alexander could see how Duo's house was a place of status. While the main train line ran in and out, the line went through a couple of kilometers of forest land in both directions, all around it. The house itself kept with the slightly Victorian flair, done in blue and white, with ornate trim and wind vanes, even though no wind blew on the space station. Watching from inside Duo's private car on the train, he knew he'd never seen it before, but it still felt like coming home.

"Are there no cars on this colony," Alexander asked Quatre. It was only them, Amira, and Duo in the car.

"No," Quatre said, now strong enough to roll his own chair back from the table he and Alexander. "Duo loves cars way too much not to have roads. The train lines were designed so you can't see the roads while on the train."

"Who designed this colony?" Heero asked, also rising, dropping his napkin back on the small table.

"Duo, mostly," Quatre said as the train came to a slightly rocking stop. "After The Rage, we recovered him in a life pod, along with all the other survivors. He was in a dreadful state. He didn't speak in coherent sentences for two years after he was recovered. The physical damage alone would have killed him had he not had access to care on L4. After he began to fully recover, I suggested this colony and the group home as a focus for him. It has been a wonderful success. He's raised over a hundred children that wouldn't have been a good fit anywhere else. This colony is a haven for art and science. It has launched two deep space exploration vessels."

Alexander really didn't know what to say to that. Then other staff were entering the car, transferring Duo's sleeping form to a hovering stretcher. In sleep the man looked so peaceful, beautiful, like

Sleeping Beauty. He wanted so much to reach out and touch that slightly blushing cheek, those lips.

"You didn't cause his attack," Quatre said firmly. "The tumor is at war with rest of his brain. It was just bad timing."

"Bad timing," Alexander agreed, following Quatre out of the train car.

A young opened the door for them and started at Duo worriedly as he was brought in. She had dark circles under her eyes and her clothes all looked a little larger than they should be. She held out her hand to Quatre. "Welcome to Tintagel. I'm Charlotte, Duo's personal assistant."

"Yes, of course," Quatre said, "I'm Quatre Raberba Winner. The gentleman behind me is Professor Alexander Tanaka. He will be staying for a while. I'll be here for a little while. See that a room is made up for both of us."

"Yes, sir," she said, her eyes wide, her breath half held as Quatre held her hand. When he let go, slightly flustered she turned to Alexander, who looked exactly like Heero Yuy, so much so that she nearly forgot how to speak. Quatre was one thing, but someone that knew both Duo and Quatre who looked that much like Heero Yuy - It was like a Roman meeting Romulus or Remus. She reached for his hand and he shook, just a normal handshake, but she couldn't quite get air into her throat. "Professor Tanaka."

"Charlotte San," he replied politely, much more concerned with getting his hand back and dispelling any misplaced hero worship. "I look like Heero Yuy. I have often been mistaken for him."

"I see," she said, nodding like that make perfect sense. She closed the door. "School won't be out for another couple of hours. I thought Duo was coming home tomorrow."

"We made good time," Quatre said, already moving on from his conversation with her.

"Sister Maria," he greeted a woman in a rocking chair with a small baby in her arms. "I appreciate you being able to help out at such short notice."

"My pleasure," Sister Maria said sweetly. The baby in her arm, with just a touch of bright red hair, laughed and waved her little fist at Quatre. "You didn't tell me he had a newborn here though."

"That's because he doesn't," Quatre said, reaching out to tickle the baby's foot, "Does he, Julia?"

The baby's eyes focused on Quatre. Quatre glared back, blue eyes narrowing reproachfully.

When a black cat jumped down from Sister Maria's arms, she yipped so loudly it was more scream than yip. She watched as the baby, now a black cat ran and jumped onto Duo's belly, curling up and glaring back at Quatre.

Quatre motioned for the health workers to leave the cat alone. "Miss

Charlotte, please show them to the elevator and up to Duo's room."

"Of course," she said motioning for them to follow her.

Alexander's mouth hung open. "What was that all about?"

"Tintagel hosts unusual children. Julia is pretty much a permanent resident, though Duo keeps telling me that her condition continues to improve. He's always been very optimistic."

The cat purred as the medical staff guided Duo's off to the elevator.

"I know you're awake," Alexander said gently. "You've been awake for ten hours, but you don't open your eyes. Why?"

Duo lay in his own bed, a monitor bracelet on his arm. His heart rate sped up a little at the sound of Alexander's voice. When Alexander ran fingers over the back of Duo's hand. "What are you afraid of?"

"That when I open my eyes, you'll be gone. I know I'm insane. I'm really sorry, Heero. I just...", Duo reached up to scrub his face. "I don't know what happened. My Heero's actually gone."

Alexander touched the tips of his fingers to Duo's lips. "So you didn't like that kiss? It was my first kiss, I think, though I guess that can't be true. I think I must have kissed you before."

Violet eyes snapped open, crossing to look at the fingertips on his lips, then snapping up to look at Alexander. "Wait," Duo said, jerking up into a sitting position and realizing he was in his own bed, his own room. "Are you really here?"

"I am."

"Do... you remember?"

"No." Alexander said, his fingers templeing, blue eyes calm. "Heidegger said that Every man is born as many men and dies as a single one, but we don't really die anymore, unless we wish to. Whatever man I am, I am drawn to you, Duo. I find my being in relation to you. I wasn't alive until I kissed you. My entire life was like following a recipe that someone else selected. Please forgive me, for not remembering Heero, but please give me a chance to see who I will be."

Duo ran a hand through his mussed up hair and stared at Heero. Sitting lotus style, hands holding the back of his head, he said in a hushed voice, "You know I'm probably fucking dying, right? Fuckin' sorry about having an attack when we kissed. That was unfortunate and I fucked up your life. That was really selfish of me."

"Duo," Alexander said softly, scooting to the edge of his seat. "You're depressed. It's a lingering effect of the illness. We are not going to let you die. We're going to find or create an encryption key, completely cure you. Many people love you. I think I have loved you from before I existed. Whatever happened on The Rage, we survived. I was lost, but you never stopped looking for me. You're a

little lost too, but we will learn to steer the boat together."

"No, look, Alexander... Sometimes I lose time. I'll be in one place.. And ... like I found out about you when I was camping.. Then when I woke up I was on Ll. I think sometimes I kill people," Duo said, holding up his hands. He'd broken out into a cold sweat, eyes tingling with tears that he didn't want to cry. "I think I'm dangerous, Alexander."

Alexander reached out to gently run his fingers over Duo's hand, then when Duo didn't pull away, to lace their fingers together. "Did you that I can take apart and put back together more firearms than I knew existed? My hands just move through it like I've been doing it all my life. It feels as natural as brushing my teeth."

"Not surprised," Duo admitted, staring at their entwined hands. "Are you... are you staying?" Duo looked up, a tear slipping down his face.

"Yeah. I'm staying. "I believe you offered me a job."

"But.. your parents? My god, that's a strange thing to say. Are they really your parents? You remembering being a child?"

Alexander arched an eyebrow. "Mother has a collection of my baby teeth. They will be here this afternoon. You've been unconscious for two weeks, just to let you know."

"Oh that's shit." He scrubbed hard at his face. "Ty's gonna be so pissy with me. Oh god, have you been here all that time?"

"I have. Mr. Winner also hired a doctor to stay here with us and another aide to help with the children. They have all been very somber. I think they fear if you are not able to take care of them, that they will not be safe anymore."

"Wull," Duo said swinging his legs over the bed. "We'll have to make sure that doesn't happen, won't we?"

Alexander smiled, giving Duo's hand a little squeeze. "That we will."

10. Chapter 10

A Wrench to the Heart 10/?

By Max

Disclaimer: I don't own Gundam Wing

That conversation lasted a few minutes, and then Duo passed out again. Alexander was much more okay with this sleep though because it was more like a normal sleep with his new friend rolling and kicking at the covers. He didn't expect him to sleep too long, so he went downstairs to work on lunch. He approved of the layout of the house - with a healthy play area in the back with an obstacle course and a good track to run on, study areas on the first floor with work stations and functional laboratory for exploratory work, and even a small stage for theater and art productions. The kids said that Duo

occasionally sang. The idea of Duo singing was way more erotic to him than he had any right to be thinking about as he cut up apples to feed to children that he fully expected were like his... step-children?

The hair on the back of his neck stood up and out of the corner of his eye, he saw a small boy crawling down the counter towards him. "Get off the counter," Alexander said, without taking his eyes off the apples he was cutting up.

Of all the children in the home, Roy was the most mysterious to Alexander. All the rest of them had backstories and explanations. Most of them came from some space going culture that didn't want to assimilate with contemporary culture or had some kind of trauma that made them difficult to treat. Alessa had an unreasonably high IQ and had been sent to Tintagel so an educational plan could be adapted to her. Roy was more of a mystery to Alexander. His records were classified and Duo wasn't awake enough to answer questions about him.

"Get off the counter, Roy," Alexander said again.

The boy was small, with slightly green hair and unsettling silver eyes. "No."

Alexander wiped the knife off and put it back in the knife rack. "Excuse me?"

"No."

"It is not acceptable for you to be on the counter. We prepare food on the counter and it is a health concern. Please remove yourself from the counter."

"Are you gonna kill the monsters?"

"There are not such things as monsters," Alexander said in his most comforting voice.

Roy sat back, crossing his legs in the same way that Duo seemed to like to sit. Those silver eyes glared at Alexander as if he were stupid. "Well, if Daddy's sick, somebody has gotta kill the monsters."

Alexander was hesitant to reach out and move the child off the counter. The littlest girl who had been a baby when he'd first walked through the door turned into a really realistic 'face hugger' when he picked her up to bring her inside. Sister Maria had tried desperately to get the thing off, but it didn't budge until Charlie screamed Julia's name and threatened to wake Duo by force if she had to. Alexander felt justified in not touching another child at this point. "There are no monsters, Roy. There are only people. I will protect you from people."

Roy sat back, swinging his legs over the side, and sucked on his thumb for a moment. "I want an apple slice," he said around his thumb.

Alexander felt as if he were being extorted, but he didn't really mind giving the kid a slice of apple. "Yes."

He handed over a slice of apple and the kid licked it, eyed the slices in the bowl. "They're all the same size."

"Yes."

"Is it hard?" Roy asked while chewing.

"No." Alexander said, moving on to the carrots he was cutting for the stirfry that Charlie said she wanted to make for dinner.

"The monsters made me eat my brother. Can I have another apple?"

Alexander's eyebrow twitched. "I'm sorry they did that," he said, offering him another slice of apple.

"I don't think the monsters are afraid of you," Roy said judgmentally. "You're not scary."

"I'm glad," Alexander said. "I don't want to be scary, but I would like you to get off the counter please."

The boy's tongue flicked out to lick the apple and Alexander was sure he saw it was forked. He slipped from the counter and ran out the back door.

This was the island of lost toys. Alexander took a slow breath and went back to chopping carrots.

There were five pounds of carrots left to be peeled and chopped when the door was knocked upon. Irritation. There were too many people in this house. People coming. People going. People who weren't people. Carrots which weren't getting chopped and Alexander whipped his knife, put it in the rack.

The space between the kitchen and the front door was a large open sitting space, that no one ever seemed to use. Couches and chairs were spaced around the space, which seemed normal and fine to Alexander, but the slide and several swings that hung from the ceiling grated on his sense of normalcy.

He was still irritated when he got to the door and pulled it open with more force than might have been needed. There were two men on the step, both in Preventer's uniform, which set Alexander's stomach to twitching. The guy in the front had long dark hair and brown eyes. He smiled like he was coming home. "Hi," he said cheerfully as he started to move towards the open door.

Alexander blocked the space, pulling the door just narrow enough for him to stand there. "Yes."

"Uh. I'm Raine Maxwell. I've come to see my dad. Who the hell are you?"

The guy with him put a hand on Raine's shoulder while reaching into his jacket to pull out an ID. "We're with Preventers. We're not here on official business or anything. We heard Duo was sick and we wanted to come see him. He served in the Second Medical Corps in his time. We brought him a video and a card." The guy smiled calmly.

His heart hurt, literally hurt. "I'm Alexander Tanaka."

Raine wedged his way in, slipping past Alexander and smiling as Alexander glared. "Are you the new assistant?"

"No."

"So you his boyfriend then," Raine asked, dropping a backpack on the couch and bending to take off his boots. "You ain't been here long if you still wearing shoes in his house, dude."

Alexander rubbed his temple. He'd never had guests at his old house, ever. His world consisted of math, transfer orbits, and teaching arrogant people how not to die while navigating. At no point... at anyone ever bitten him on the calf. The pain in his leg drew his eyes down to his right calf where Roy was literally chomping on his leg, curled around him like some angry cat. Mouth open, he just stared.

Raine reached down and grabbed the kid by the scruff of the neck, holding him up in the air as his legs wheeled in the air. "Now, you know better than that! Dad don't let you bite folk, does he?"

Roy's definitely forked tongue flashed out, flickering in the air, and he went limp, hanging by the scruff of his neck. "HE don't believe in monsters!"

"Most folk don't," Raine said, "That ain't no cause to be biting them! I'm gonna put you down, then you're gonna go the sitting room and meditate for two full clicks. Don't you make me tell Dad on you."

"Yes, Sir," Roy said where he hung in the air. "Don't tell Dad. Please. I won't bite him no more."

"You better not bite anyone. You know it makes people sick, Roy. Now go think about what you did." He set Roy down on his feet and pointed to the hall by the kitchen. "As for you," Raine turned to Alexander. "You're going to want to go to the first aide kit, right away. If his saliva got on you, well, it can cause psychosis. I know Dad likes crazy folk, but that could still cause problems."

"Really," Alexander said, already striding towards to the first aide kit in the kitchen. "Psychosis... "

His fingers were centimeters from the activation button when he fell through the rabbit hole.

He didn't know where he was. The air smelled of oil and blood, sulfur, ozone. Floor under his feet felt shaky and hot. As the world came into focus, Duo was on a small bridge in front of him. Wind, actual wind, so they were on some planetary body, lifted that long braid and twisted it round. He was the most beautiful sight Alexander... Heero had ever seen. He was Heero Yuy.

Decades of training, bullet wounds, bruises, emotional abuse all dumped on him at once and he dropped to his knees in Duo's kitchen, five pounds of carrots still unpeeled in the sink.

In the memory, Duo went to a knee in front of him, those splendid violet eyes filled with so much love. "You have to get up, 'Ro. Just a little farther, I promise, 'kay?"

Heero had never felt so vulnerable, so lost. Not a single day in Alexander's childhood memories left him feeling so lost, so completely undone that the world had only point that made any sense. "They can't get us now," he said, and he could hear his own voice, so frail and frightened. Still adult and not dissimilar to the voice he'd always known for himself, but in that moment raw and wounded innocence of a soul completely stripped of defenses, of sense. "We're going to be okay?"

Duo smiled at him, winked. Not a smudge of soot touched that face, no red, no scrapes, even his hair which the wind tossed, was all smooth and neat. "Just a little farther, Heero. I promise, I'll never let them hurt you again. They'll never find you."

"Us," Heero said firmly. Duo motioned for him to move farther across the bridge, but each step was fire through his bones, electric in his teeth. "Us, Duo!"

Love moved him forward. Moving closer to Duo was worth whatever temporary pain his body gave him. Somehow he finished at the end of the narrow metal catwalk bridge. Duo was squatting down next to an escape pod. "Come on, Baby," he said, winking, still completely pristine, even though the very air seemed on fire, glittering bits of debris floating on the wind. "You get in first. You know I love you more than anything in the world, right?"

"Yeah," Heero said, groaning loudly as he knelt and half fell into the escape pod. "I love you too. I love you so much, Duo! I can't live without you," he said, and god, he knew... in that memory he relived all over again realizing that Duo wasn't actually there with him. "I. Can. Not. Live... Without. You."

"I know, Baby," Duo said, leaning closer to touch their lips together. The kiss felt so real, but even in the memory Heero knew it was only the memory of a memory that felt real. "You're gonna be okay. I took care of it. You're gonna be happy and safe."

"Where are you? I'll find you!" Heero said, desperate, but unable to fight against the pod as it sedated him, applying medical care, easing his pain, pulling him into the sleep that would keep him until rescue.

"Baby," Duo said softly, fingers brushing over Heero's lips. "I love you. I'm on The Rage, but I'm as good as dead. I'm hamburger. I can't get in a pod. I'm done. Sleep, Sweetie, just sleep. When you wake up, everything will be okay."

The pod closed, cutting through the simulation that was Duo. The last bits of simulation glowed and scattered like a soul dispersing.

"Hey," Duo said.

Heero opened his eyes. They both lay on the kitchen floor. The rest of the crew was working on dinner. The scent of beef roast and fresh bread filled the kitchen. Duo looked good, refreshed, color in his

cheeks, soft rosy lips. Heero reached up to brush chocolate bangs back, to feel that silky splendid hair. "I love you."

Duo blinked, slow, lips parting. For a moment held his lower lip between his teeth. "Heero?"

"Yes."

Charlie leaned over them both, hands on her hips. "Good. Get off my floor. We're making dinner here."

End
file.